

Facebook and Television News, A Qualitative Analysis Using Napoli's Theory of
Engagement

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Abstract

In an effort to gain viewership, television stations put a lot of resources into the promotion of their newscasts. One way the stations reach the audience is through social media which has had a large impact on the way television news organizations connect with viewers. This qualitative analysis examines Facebook users' responses with regard to Facebook posts generated by television news stations. This study looks at how the audience uses media messages generated on Facebook.

Introduction

There are many ways people can use social media, such as: actively posting in public, passively responding (clicking Like, sharing, etc.) and privately messaging. Social networks are primarily used to keep in contact with others (Shang, Chen & Chang, 2015). Bateman et al. define social media as: “interactive, web-based technologies that enable users to create public (or semi-public) profiles, articulate lists of other users with whom they share a connection, and view those connections – with the goal of affording individual users the ability to create content.” The profiles are important to the growth of one’s social network. A profile is a representation of a person online. It reflects the basic information about that person and presents the person to others online. Other users can see this profile and decide if they want to connect with that person. Many times it’s a previously established relationship that is given a new, social media dynamic. Other times, social media provide a platform for developing fresh, web-borne connections (2011).

The ability to create content is a crucial aspect to the growth of one’s social network. It is through the creation of online content that one expresses one’s identity. When this content is made public, other users can see what one creates. Potential connections are made when a user identifies with the content another creates. Social networking sites not only help grow already established relationships, but also foster new ones. One can take an “offline”, face-to-face connection and develop it online. The relationship between two people does not

necessarily change; the place where the persons connect expands to the web (Pai & Yeh, 2013).

What began with a focus on friend-to-friend relationships has broadened into the business world. Now, many companies use social media as a major marketing tool. It is a branding instrument that can reach thousands of potential customers at one time. Content can be distributed through a social network quickly and efficiently. It is an effective marketing tool considering large groups of people can see a brand's message (Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2016).

Zhang, Guo, Hu & Liu (2016) define stickiness as "customers' time spent on a company social network." Stickiness makes up a social network's ability to retain customers as well as a customer's visit time length (Zhang, Guo, Hu & Liu, 2016). A recent study by Aggregate Knowledge found that companies that included social media increased sales by 24% (Zhang, Guo, Hu & Liu, 2016). Via social media, a two-way communication is developed: both the marketer and the user share information (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016). If someone finds out about a product from a Facebook friend, that person is more likely to engage with the brand than if the information was found in means different than Facebook.

Television news stations are trying to figure out how best to use social media to boost newscast audience and increasingly stations are adding web-based tools as a part of their overall marketing strategy. For-profit television news stations are in the business of attracting viewers. The more viewers who watch a

newscast the higher a rating that newscast will gain. A higher-rated newscast is more attractive to advertisers because more people are watching and potentially more people will see commercial content. With this, the value of each commercial sold within that particular newscast goes up and the more money a station can draw. Social media gives news organizations a chance to provide their audience with information. At the same time, a television station can enhance its brand loyalty. Reinforcing loyalty means customers will seek a station's content in the future (Chan-Olmstead & Ha, 2003).

This brings us back to the individual social media user. Generally, users join social media networks to connect with other people. But another function of social media is to follow organizations. On Facebook, users can follow their favorite band, actor or for the purpose of this research – a local television news station. Users like and follow a local television station's Facebook page for a variety of reasons. They may enjoy a particular news personality on that station, they may be an avid watcher of that station, or they may follow the page in addition to other television news station Facebook pages to simply keep up on what's happening in the community. A user may begin to follow a page because another user in his or her network is following the page. The way that Facebook is set up shows users what friends are following on their own timeline.

According to a 2016 Pew Research Center study, nearly two-thirds of adults in the United States get news on social media. This compares to about half of adults in 2012 (Gottfried & Shearer, Pew Research Center, 2016). Most local television newsrooms in the United States have embraced social media as a way

to connect with the viewers. But how do a television station's Facebook fans use the information that stations are posting? It is the intention of this paper to analyze the user comments in response to television news stations' Does a Facebook post prompt a user to watch a local television station's newscast?

This paper examines the use of social media, specifically Facebook, by local television news stations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, Denver, Colorado, Phoenix, Arizona, and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida television markets.

The study examines Facebook instead of other popular social media sites because of its powerful and accessible analytics. Facebook is unique in that it displays a thread of comments based on an initial post. Facebook is also widely used by television stations. According to a RTDNA/Hofstra study, all television stations surveyed report using a Facebook page (2016).

Within this paper I will examine key concepts that will help guide this research by implementing Napoli's framework of engagement. Through this, I set the foundation for this study. I will evaluate the responses of participants tying this back to Napoli's work as well as incorporating the Uses & Gratifications (U&G) Theory. Based on the subjects' responses, I will draw conclusions about the thought process of Facebook users who comment on television stations' newsfeed walls. I will compare these conclusions with the research question I propose. I will then lay the groundwork for future scholarly work.

Study purpose

The purpose of this paper is to find out how Facebook fans use television stations' Facebook posts to gratify their needs. It is also my intention to uncover the types of posts most frequently posted by stations and the users' overall reactions to those posts. All of this information may provide insight into whether a Facebook post would prompt a user to watch a television station's newscast.

This paper will add to a better understanding of how those who follow television news stations on Facebook use the content posted by the station or other users. It will uncover the interaction between a Facebook user and the television station.

The findings will provide other scholars a resource for their own studies of people's use of news station social media sites and lay the ground work for future studies. In a broader sense, I will supply useful information to scholars looking at overall uses of social media. It will add to the literature the dynamics between social media and television.

From a professional perspective, it will benefit news organizations trying to maximize the impact of social media. Understanding how the audience uses the media messages posted on Facebook is invaluable. Professional media organizations can pull ideas out of this research and employ them in their own marketing efforts.

Statement of the problem

Commercial, for-profit television stations need to make money to survive a very competitive environment. A local television station's news department is a

major revenue generator. Advertising rates are determined by how many viewers watch a station's newscasts. A station can charge a higher price for commercials within highly-rated shows. Television stations gain an audience by providing a superior product and successfully marketing that product. In part, this means creating interesting news stories and promoting them properly (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Strategic use of social media is one of the tools in a television station's marketing toolbox. Considering Facebook has only been around for 13 years and employed by local television stations as a marketing tool for an even shorter period, newscast promotion on Facebook is relatively new in the lifetime of television news. In other words, television stations are still trying to figure out how to best market their product on social media.

Marketing practices take time to develop and that is why I believe that Facebook promotion is still in its infancy and will continue to develop in the years to come. It is the hope of this research to add useful insight into the thought process of the end user of television news stations' Facebook posts. This paper aims to better understand why and how people use the Facebook messages posted by television stations.

The following literature review will reveal key concepts which are central to my research. The concepts all link to Napoli's framework of engagement. It is with this theoretical framework that I define the concepts of engagement, social media, Facebook, and audience feedback loop. By defining each of these concepts, I provide context for the forthcoming research questions. Another component that is crucial to this research is the Uses & Gratifications (U&G)

Theory This theory combined with Napoli's concept of engagement should help better understand the uses of television news station Facebook fans.

Literature Review

Engagement

Engagement is at the heart of this research. It can be defined by introducing a potential consumer to an idea enhanced by the surrounding context. For commercial television stations, it's the hope for an increase in revenue by engaging with the audience, "achieving a level of 'hyper-engagement' whereby audiences are progressively built up and can then be directed towards those distributive outlets where attention is converted to revenue is crucial" (Doyle, 2010).

Napoli provides a useful framework for engagement that includes nine key elements: awareness, interest, exposure, attentiveness, loyalty, appreciation, emotion, recall, attitude, and behavior.

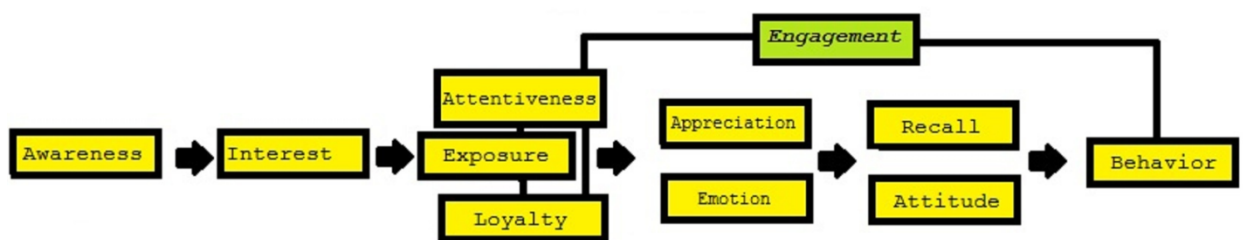


Figure A. Napoli's Framework for engagement (2011, 91).

These elements occur in order. Napoli defines *awareness* as, "The decision to consume a particular piece of media content often begins with the

audience member becoming aware of that content's availability in advance.”

Sometimes incidences of awareness may come in the form of a random find. The audience may not have been looking for that specific piece of content, but accidentally comes in contact with it (Sunstein, 2007). An example of this type of awareness is exhibited when one surfs the web and discovers something that they were not necessarily seeking.

If *awareness* is that moment when you come into contact with something, *interest* happens when that something resonates with you. You may be aware of a certain type of media, but unless that item impresses you in some fashion, *interest* won't happen. You have to want to know or learn about whatever you are aware of to have *interest*.

The next step is *exposure*. If there is enough interest in a particular media message, *exposure* can happen. While awareness and interest may be a one-time instance, *exposure* is repeatedly having interest to the same or similar media message. You may haphazardly find a particular news website that you were made aware of and that interested you. Now, if you come in contact with it again, you are already aware and interested in it and you become exposed to it because you have crossed paths with it again.

So, you find yourself in contact with a particular media message multiple times. That's *exposure*. *Attentiveness* takes that another step and refers to the amount of time you spend with that media or media message each time you're exposed to it. Typically, *attentiveness* is defined in terms of the time spent per

exposure. “Stickiness” has been used to describe *attentiveness* in the online world. How much time a user spends on a specific website is an example of *attentiveness* (Bermejo 2007).

For Napoli, *loyalty* is essentially the audience coming back for more, again and again. How frequently a consumer seeks out a particular website is a measure of *loyalty*. Audiences don’t just keep coming back for more without good reason. There has to be multiple positive experiences with that medium for an audience member to develop *loyalty*. This not only has to do with repeatedly using the brand but also encouraging others to use that item (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008).

Napoli describes *appreciation* and *emotion* as very closely linked. After someone is exposed to a media message, did they like it? Did exposure to this item cause them to dislike it? That’s *appreciation*. *Emotion* is slightly different. How did it affect them? At an emotional level, did it affect them positively or negatively? *Emotion* has been measured in a variety of ways including facial recognition technology and heart rate monitoring.

Outgrowths of the level of appreciation or emotion the audience member experiences from the content are *recall* and *attitude*. According to Napoli, *recall* and *attitude* reflect a deeper and more lasting effect that can arise from *exposure*. *Recall* and *attitude* can therefore influence *behavior*. Changes in *behavior* can manifest into following a television news station’s Facebook page, clicking on its website or watching one of the station’s newscasts.

In terms of this research, the behavior to be studied is whether a social media user acknowledges a Facebook message posted by a television station. My research shows that users acknowledge Facebook post messages by stations in a variety of ways. They can “like” a post by which they acknowledge support for the content in the message. They can “comment” on the original post adding their opinion to a thread of other comments by other users. They can also “share,” which essentially takes the station’s particular posts and places them on their Facebook timeline for their friends to see.

Uses & Gratifications

The Uses & Gratifications Theory (U&G) is vital to my research. This media effects theory was developed in the 1940s when researchers wanted to find out what kind of gratifications people got from listening to programs on the radio (Lazarsfeld, 1941). U&G looks at needs and how they are influenced by personal characteristics as well as the environment within which a person interacts socially (Ruggiero, 2000). When U&G was introduced, it took a different approach to studying media effects than other theories. Essentially, U&G sought to find out what the audience does with media, not what media do to the audience. How do audience members use media to gratify needs? What are the motives for media use (Chen, 2011)? At the heart of U&G is the idea of an active audience (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). As Blumler explained, “it sought to replace the image of the audience as a passive victim” (1979).

People use media to gratify their needs for a variety of purposes. Some want to gain information while others want to gain a better understanding from a cultural perspective (Ruggiero, 2000). Others seek media as a diversion, to form personal relationships, and to develop who they are as a person (Katz & Gurevitch, 1973). Once a person finds a medium that satisfies a specific need, that person will come back again and again to that particular medium (Chen, 2011).

How people use social media is major part of this paper and U&G has been a perfect fit for the study of media effects and social media. Social media encompass mass communication but they also offer a relational component. This meshes with U&G because the theory asks what people do with media (Chen, 2011). When people use the Internet it is in a premeditated fashion. They choose to log onto the web and more specifically, they make a conscious effort to seek out a particular website (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

Another dynamic of the Internet and social media that lends itself to U&G is the vast number of communication options (Ruggiero, 2000). There are so many choices out there that people have to be pickier than in the past (Chen, 2011). There are not only more options to fulfill needs, but there are a greater number of technologies available to facilitate the seeking process.

When discussing U&G it is important to discuss the psychological perspective. According to Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005), U&G theory defines the psychological needs that shape why people use a particular medium. There is a certain self-awareness at play here. The audience members are aware of what

their needs are and will pick the relevant media to fulfill their needs. U&G proposes that media use will be different based on individual needs and motives (Lee, 2013). U&G acknowledges that two different people may choose the same medium with two very different goals (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005).

The respondents I interviewed had different specific uses and gratifications for using Facebook, but there was a common thread. Connecting with others was a typical theme. While the connections varied, the idea of using this social medium to keep in contact with people who did not live close by was a reason all of my respondents cited for participating in Facebook.

Social media

boyd and Ellison define social media as ‘web-based services that allow individuals to, (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (2010). Social media offer a wide range of forums where users can interact and discuss a variety of topics (Mangold, 2009).

Social media has developed into a trend setter due to its speed and reach. It also is a strong agenda setter and drives conversations and interactions on several topics (Brooks, 2015). Social media allows users to share information and in some cases influence others (Korham & Ersoy, 2016).

According to Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl & Pingree (2015), when people access news from social media, the user is more likely to trust the source if

the user views the person sharing the news as an opinion leader. A unique aspect of Facebook is that the journalists who post news articles as well as friends who share articles act as gatekeepers. If someone follows a particular news organization's Facebook page, that person will see what it posts. The same is true if a friend posts a news item. Either way, the person posting the news acts as a gatekeeper.

When sharing news on Facebook, in general, the post will garner more engagement if the post is public (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl & Pingree, 2015). For many Facebook users, their timeline is inundated with all kinds of information. Typically, articles that are posted by people deemed trustworthy by the user will get more attention (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl & Pingree, 2015).

Facebook

As of December, 2016, the social media website, Facebook, had more than 1.86 billion monthly active users and 1.15 billion daily active users on average (Facebook, 2016). It began 13 years ago as a college campus directory and later grew into a commercial site. Those who sign up for Facebook are a part of a network (Ellison, 2007). Businesses are adopting new marketing strategies that are unlike traditional ones (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). People can follow the content of their pages and likewise, companies can track metrics generated from their wall posts (Ju et al., 2014). One of the biggest draws to Facebook for television news stations is that it allows a station to reach a different audience (Bateman et al., 2011).

Audience Feedback Loop

Facebook provides a feedback loop that helps businesses instantly measure the effectiveness of a message. This immediate response can help guide a television station and reveal what messages are acknowledged and what messages are ignored (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). While traditional media employ a one-directional communication from a station to a user, social media empowers people to respond. (Pai & Yeh, 2013). Organizations can quickly mine valuable feedback based on the reaction of the audience (Ramsaran-Gowdar & Fowdar, 2013).

The reaction of the audience is at the heart of this project. I sought to find out how people reacted to Facebook messages posted by television news stations. This audience feedback loop can be as simple as looking at how many people liked, commented or shared a particular post. It can be as complex as analyzing the interplay between two people commenting on the same initial message. Either way, the audience feedback loop is a minute-by-minute report card on how engaging a television news station's Facebook post has become.

Brand Extension Theory

For the purposes of this study, it is important to explore Brand Extension Theory (BET). Branding is used to help make a distinction between the name of one product and another. By doing so, a competitive advantage is sought after. Brand equity plays a big role in the way television stations market themselves. In this case, brand equity can manifest itself into a highly loyal audience. This can be

an audience that repeatedly chooses to watch a specific television station's newscasts (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004). In many marketplaces, there is fierce competition for the consumers' dollars. A brand that is well-managed distinguishes itself from the competition, convincing customers that it is better than anything else available (McDowell, 2011).

BET takes this idea a step farther. It proposes that a fan of a television station newscast will choose other products provided by that organization (i.e., website content, social media material). Ha & Chan-Olmsted (2004) describe a certain fandom as the television news station's brand asset. Their research explains that the greater number of fans of that station equals a higher value of brand equity.

According to BET, the same confidence a consumer has for the on-air television news broadcast product shifts to the company's other offerings. Basically, if a consumer is fond of a station's news product, she will have the same type of affinity with its online and social media products (Kim, Lovack & Smith, 2001). The more the new product matches with the original brand, the greater the power of brand extension (Aaker and Keller, 1990).

Brand extension can be a powerful mechanism for a business. If the positive feelings toward a brand are transferred from an older product to a newer product, there is cost saving. The association with a well-liked, established product of the same brand can strengthen a newer product (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004).

Keep in mind that brand extension can only occur if the consumer is aware of a new product under the same brand umbrella. Cross-promotional efforts are used quite frequently in the broadcast news business. It's not only a way to align a brand to a new product but to also promote that it exists (Coffey & Cleary, 2011).

All of the participants of my research were aware of a station's brand. But they differed in whether brand extension was transferring from the television news station's on-air product to its Facebook page.

Based on my literature review and analysis of the concepts of engagement, social media, Facebook, audience feedback loop, the Uses & Gratifications theory, and Brand Extension Theory, I propose the following research question:

RQ: How do television station Facebook posts impact television newscast viewing by social media users?

One assumption of U&G theory is that the way people use the media is discriminatory and driven by logical reflection of the individual's own needs. It is then believed that those needs will be satisfied by a specific media and content (Ruggiero, 2000). When looking at this research question we should emphasize U&G's idea of an active audience. The tie between a need fulfillment and media selection lies with the user (Katz et al., 1973).

When a person chooses to use a television station's Facebook page, that person makes a conscious selection with some kind of goal in mind. According to Chen (2011), "U&G holds that multiple media compete for users' attention, and audience members select the medium that meets their needs, such as desire for

information, emotional connection, and status.” A user will make a choice based on her needs and expectations. The guides for these decisions are social and psychological components (2011). People know what their needs are and will seek out the medium that best satisfies the needs (Ko et al., 2005).

With this research question in mind, I will be looking for patterns in Facebook user comments and in their answers to my questions. Through systematic coding, themes will emerge from user comments. I will use these themes to explain user behavior in the context of Facebook use and television newscast viewing.

Methods – Describing the case

This is a qualitative study that attempts to understand what people seek out when following a television news station on Facebook. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it allows me to ask questions and clarifying follow up questions that would not be an option using another method.

Specifically, I use the grounded theory method in this research. The grounded theory method operates very differently compared to other methods in social science research. The researcher poses a research question and gathers a set of qualitative data to analyze. Grounded theory method is appropriate here because little is known about the relationship between Facebook posts and television news viewing, which means there is little guidance on how to theorize that relationship. It is also conducive to this study because it offers explanations of complex social processes. Grounded theory method forces one to build

tentative theoretical ideas from the analysis of data and test them via further analysis. Codes can be extracted from the data which lead to categories. It is those categories that lead to the development of a new theory (Oktay, 2012).

I analyzed Facebook posts and user comments for all four major network-affiliated television news stations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, Phoenix, and Tampa-St. Petersburg markets March 1, 2015 through March 7, 2015. These markets are similar in size according to the Nielsen television market rankings. Each of these markets has a similar-sized number of homes with televisions. According to Nielsen, Phoenix is the 11th-largest U.S. television market and has 1,834,360 television homes. Tampa-St. Petersburg is the 13th largest market and has 1,822,550 homes with households. The 15th-largest market is Minneapolis-St. Paul. It has 1,730,170 television homes. Meanwhile, Denver has 1,565,760 homes with televisions and is the 17th-biggest television market in the country. Additionally, these markets offer four news-producing stations affiliated or owned by one of the four national networks - ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC (Nielsen).

In the spirit of comparing and contrasting, these markets also offer plenty of differences. The Tampa-St. Petersburg market is the Eastern Time zone. The Minneapolis-St. Paul market is within the Central Time zone. Denver is in the Mountain Time Zone. For the purposes of this study, Phoenix was also on Mountain Time zone. Much of Arizona does not recognize daylight saving. This means that half of the year the state is on Mountain Time and the other half of the year it is on Pacific Time. Phoenix, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Denver all have a

late newscast airing at 10:00 p.m. local time. Tampa-St. Petersburg airs its late news at 11:00 p.m.

Analyzing Facebook posts instead of other social media messages is important for two reasons. First, Facebook provides a forum that is favorable to back and forth interaction among users and the station staff. A news station can post a message that can then be responded to by its Facebook followers. Secondly, this message ‘trail’ can easily be traced. If a user isn’t online at the time the initial message was posted, that user can later read the discussion and partake in the conversation.

At the time of my data gathering, the 16 television station Facebook pages in the four television news markets had varying characteristics in the number of users who followed their pages and in the frequency the station posted each night. It’s important to note the differences for later analysis.

Minneapolis-St. Paul market

The Minneapolis-St. Paul market stations I researched consisted of KSTP, an ABC affiliate, WCCO, a CBS Corporation-owned station, KMSP, a Fox Television Stations Inc.-owned station, and KARE, an NBC affiliate. KSTP-TV is owned by Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc. CBS Corporation owns 29 television stations (cbscorporation.com). Fox Television Stations Inc. owns 28 television stations ([http://www.21cf.com/Television/Fox Television Stations Group/](http://www.21cf.com/Television/Fox_Television_Stations_Group/)). Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc. owns seven television stations (kstp.com). KARE is

owned by Gannett Company, Inc. Gannett owns 46 television stations throughout the country (gannett.com).

At the time this research was conducted, KSTP had about 83,000 likes. A like is created when a Facebook user chooses to follow a specific page. During the one-week of analysis, the station posted 18 times and had an average of 2.57 posts per night. Again, the particular time period I was interested in was the three hours leading up to the late newscast known as primetime.

WCCO's Facebook page had around 129,000 likes. It posted 20 times during that week for a 2.86 posts per night average. KMSP had by far the largest group of followers with 330,000 likes. It posted 14 times averaging two posts per evening. Meanwhile, KARE had 239,000 likes. It created 17 Facebook posts during the study period. That's 2.43 posts per night.

Denver market

The Denver market stations I researched consisted of KMGH, an ABC affiliate, KCNC, a CBS-owned station, KDVR, a Fox affiliate, and KUSA, an NBC affiliate. KMGH is owned by E.W. Scripps Company. KDVR is owned by Tribune Broadcasting. E.W. Scripps Company owns 33 television stations throughout the country (<http://www.scripps.com/tv>). Tribune Broadcasting owns 42 television stations (tribunemedia.com).

KMGH had 330,000 likes at the time I conducted my research. It posted 22 times for a 3.14 average per night. KCNC had 87,000 likes and posted 30 times during that period. It averaged 4.29 posts per night. Meanwhile, KDVR had

217,000 likes at the time of my research and averaged 1.71 posts per night. KUSA had the largest number of likes of all the Denver stations with 444,000. It also posted more during my research time period with 30 total posts for an average of 4.71 posts per night.

Phoenix market

The Phoenix market stations I researched consisted of ABC affiliate KNXV, CBS affiliate KPHO, Fox Television Stations, Inc.-owned KSAZ, and NBC affiliate KPNX. KNXV is owned by E.W. Scripps Company. KPHO is owned by Meredith Corporation. Meredith Corporation owns 15 television stations across the country. KPNX is owned by Gannett Company.

KNXV had 438,000 Facebook likes and posted 13 times for an average of 1.86 posts per night. KPHO had 237,000 followers and posted the least frequent of all stations. It had six posts during the research period for a 0.86 posts per night average. KSAZ had the most likes of all of the 16 stations I studied. It had 549,000 followers and posted 18 times for an average of 2.57 posts per night. KPNX had 316,000 likes and posted 11 times for a 1.71 posts-per-night average.

Tampa-St. Petersburg market

The Tampa-St. Petersburg market stations I researched consisted of ABC affiliate WFTS, CBS affiliate WTSP, Fox Television Stations, Inc.-owned WTVT, and NBC affiliate WFLA. WFTS is owned by E.W. Scripps Company. WTSP is owned by Gannett Company. WFLA is owned by Media General. Media General owns 71 television stations (mediageneral.com).

WFTS had 219,000 likes at the time of my research. It posted 19 times averaging 2.71 posts per night. WTSP was the most prolific poster. It had 165,000 followers and posted 39 times for a 5.57 posts per night average. WTVT had 446,000 likes, posted nine times, and averaged 1.29 posts per night. Finally, WFLA had 214,000 followers. It posted 30 times during my week-long period. It averaged 4.29 posts per night.

Methods – “Unit of analysis”

This study first examines the initial messages posted by television news stations. It then examines comments by Facebook users in response to television news station Facebook posts. Most importantly, the responses of Facebook users in reference to questions about social media use will be examined. I chose a qualitative method for this study in order to better understand the process in which people use television news station Facebook pages. I also wanted to have a record of communication that I could analyze. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). In addition, a qualitative method can provide ways to make reliable observations that would not otherwise be possible (Sofaer, 1999).

I tracked Facebook comments of television news stations posts of the four major network affiliates in each of the four markets. These were tracked during a one week period, March 1-7, 2015. The specific time period analyzed was the three hours leading up to the late evening newscast, also known as primetime. Among the 16 stations, more than 300 messages were posted on Facebook during

the primetime period studied. I sent messages to the Facebook users who commented on the posts and requested an interview. Of that initial pool of more than 400 users, eight agreed to an interview. Each of the Facebook users who commented on these selected posts was asked about their social media habits.

Methods – Measures

Using specific keywords, I measured and coded the Facebook posts of the 16 stations during the one week period specifically during the three hours leading up to the late newscast. I measured and coded responses of users to the television station posts. I also measured and coded the responses of users who answer my questions.

Each message is given a code. Each of the codes falls under a conceptual heading. All concepts then belong to a specific category. It is these categories, under the direction of grounded theory, that become the backbone to my analysis.

Coding television station Facebook posts

As mentioned earlier, grounded theory involves looking at the data, drawing conclusions, and developing a theory (Oktay, 2012). The first step after determining the week and time period of my study was to extract the 303 Facebook posts produced by the 16 stations. The posts were analyzed and coded. Each of those codes was assigned a concept and the concepts were then placed into a category. The messages posted by the television stations had three distinct characteristics: content, visuals, and valence. The characteristics of the posts were assigned as categories.

The **content** category included three concepts: *action*, *attention*, and *type*. Under the action conceptual umbrella were codes: *direct promise*, *question*, and *quotations*. The concept of attention included codes: *UPDATE*, and *developing*. Meanwhile, the concept of type had codes of *news*, *weather* and *sports*.

CONTENT CATEGORY

ACTION	ATTENTION	TYPE
Direct Promise	Update	News
Question	Developing	Weather
Quotations		Sports

The **visuals** category included the concepts of *video*, *profiles*, and *nature*. Under the video concept were codes: *video link* and *direct video*. Under the portraits concept were codes: portraits and mug shots. Under the nature concept were codes: *animals* and *beauty shots*.

VISUALS CATEGORY

VIDEO	PROFILES	NATURE
Video link	Portrait	Animals
Direct video	Mug shot	Beauty shots

The **valence** category included four concepts: *neutral*, *positive*, *negative*, and *humorous*. Under the *neutral* concept were *informational* and *straight news*. Under the *positive* concept were *inspirational* and *good news*. Under the *negative* concept were *tragic news* and *bad news*. Finally, under the *humorous* concept, were the codes *funny* and *clever*.

VALENCE CATEGORY

NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Informational	Inspirational	Tragic news
Straight news	Good news	Bad news
	Funny	

Now, let's circle back to these categories, concepts and codes and examine them more deeply.

The **Content** category included three concepts: *action*, *attention*, and *type*. A post coded *direct promise* was a message that promoted an upcoming newscast where a story could be seen. These posts were similar to traditional television news promotion of 'coming up at 10' or 'next on Eyewitness News'. These posts were a direct promise of content in an upcoming newscast.

Another code was *question*. This one is pretty self-explanatory. In this case, a television station posts a message that asks a question. *Quotations* was another code. This occurred when a television station used a direct quote in its Facebook message. *Direct promise*, *question*, and *quotations* are all codes that fall under the concept of *Action*.

The concept *Attention* is made up of two codes including: *UPDATE*, and *developing*. These codes were blunt and straightforward in nature. *UPDATE* implied there was something new about an ongoing story. *Developing* is the code for a post that involved a story that was in progress and that had not fully developed yet.

The concept *Type* is made up of three codes including: *news*, *weather* and *sports*. Each of these codes indicates what kind of topic the post was about.

The **Visuals** category includes three concepts: *Video*, *Portraits*, and *Nature*.

Video link and *direct video* fall under the concept of *Video*. Posts displaying video will either offer a video link which a user clicks on to play the video or a direct video in which a user simply presses play and the video rolls out with the user's Facebook timeline.

The concept *Profiles* is comprised of a *portrait* and a *mug shot*. Portraits are images that include family photos, a class picture or a work portrait. On the other hand, *mug shots*, are pictures taken of people following an arrest by law enforcement.

The concept *Nature* is made up of *animals* and *beauty shots*. Many times television stations will post pictures of animals or beauty shot such as a sunset or falling snow.

The third category of television station Facebook posts is **Valence**. It is made up of four concepts: *Neutral*, *Positive*, *Negative*, and *Humorous*.

Informational and *straight news* are codes within the concept of *Neutral*. These are very straightforward posts that educate the user on something they might want to know or a relatively neutral news story.

The concept of *Positive* includes the codes *inspirational* and *good news*. These posts tell of an uplifting personal story or some general good news happening in the community.

The concept *Negative* is made up of the codes *tragic news* and *bad news*. *Tragic news* is more extreme than *bad news*. They both have a negative connotation.

Finally, we have the *Humorous* concept. It is made up of the codes of *funny* and *clever*.

Coding user comment responses to station FB posts or messages from other users

Each of the television news station posts I analyzed allowed users to like the post, insert a comment or share the post. The messages responding to the

initial television station post and the messages responding to other user posts were coded.

I broke these comments down in this fashion so that I could better get at the root of a messages meaning and how it relates to what my respondents reported.

These Facebook response comments fell into two categories: **positive** and **negative**.

Positive

Under the positive category umbrella is the concept of touched. Thankful, sympathetic, and understanding are all codes under the touched concept.

POSITIVE CATEGORY

TOUCHED	IMPRESSED	OPTIMISTIC
Thankful	Amazed	Cheerful
Sympathetic	Ecstatic	Passionate
Understanding	Thrilled	Funny

Another concept within the positive category is impressed. The codes that are associated with impressed include amazed, ecstatic, and thrilled.

The third concept under the positive category is optimistic. The optimistic concept is made up of the codes cheerful, passionate, and funny.

Negative

Meanwhile, the negative category of Facebook comments include the concepts of hostile, displeased, and discouraged.

NEGATIVE CATEGORY

HOSTILE	DISPLEASED	DISCOURAGED
Annoyed	Uneasy	Sad
Disgusted	Frustrated	Disappointed
Upset	Worried	Aggressive

Annoyed, disgusted, upset and aggressive are all codes that fall under the hostile concept.

The second concept within the negative category is displeased. It is made up of uneasy, frustrated, and worried.

Sad, disappointed, offended are all codes under the discouraged concept.

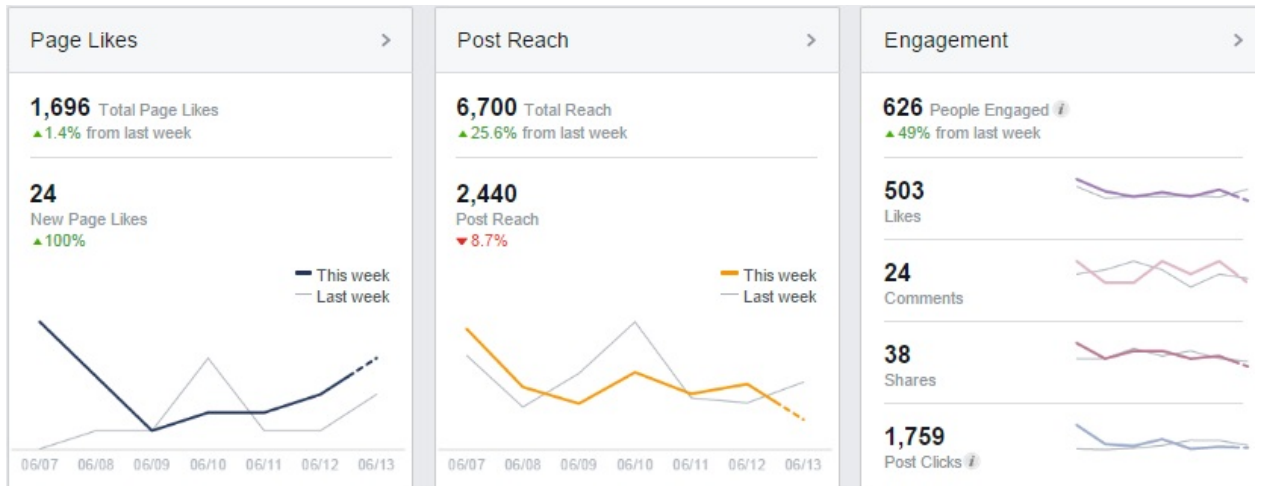
Measuring User Engagement

It's important to create a conceptual framework to measure the television station Facebook posts in this study. I've used elements from two separate studies to create a framework that captures the measurement goals of this research.

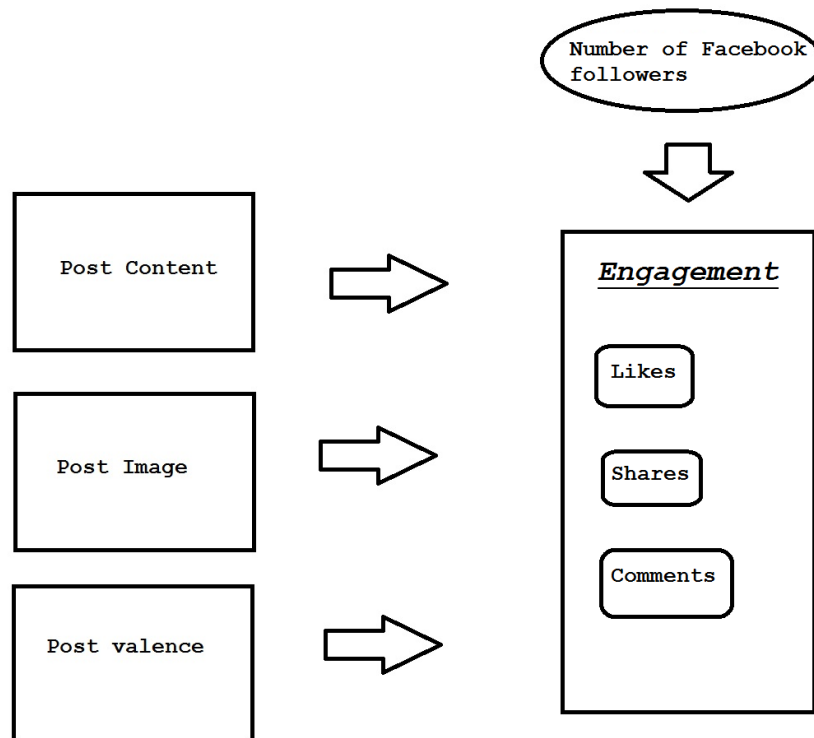
Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, (2014) devised a framework that uses likes and comments to calculate the popularity of wall post. These researchers put an emphasis on the vividness of the content and the time frame of the post. They concluded that the vividness and time frame of each posts contributed significantly to the popularity of the post. A unique and important aspect of this model is one of its controlling elements. The researchers factored in a variable to control for Facebook follower size differences. This was implemented to allow comparisons between Facebook pages with drastically different numbers of followers. This was crucial because an identical message posted on a Facebook page with many more followers than another will likely get more likes, shares, comments because of the sheer number of users seeing that post.

Another framework that I draw upon for my research was presented by Cvijikj & Michahelles in 2013. Their conceptual framework uses the content type, media type, and posting time of the Facebook messages as variables that contribute to the overall engagement of the posts defined by the number of likes, comments, shares, and the interaction duration.

In addition to these conceptual frameworks, it is important to understand how Facebook measures engagement. Facebook defines engagement as, “People Engaged is the number of unique people who have clicked, liked, commented on or shared your posts”. Below is a sample Facebook Insights analytics page:



I've used the two conceptual frameworks and information from Facebook Insights to develop a Conceptual Framework of Facebook Post Engagement:



I argue that post content, image, and valence have significant influence on a television station Facebook post's engagement level. This model includes an additional variable, controlling for size differences (number of followers of the television station Facebook page). I found the average number of Facebook followers across the station was 278,000. I use this number as a baseline in order to compare posts from different stations. Using this model, the level of engagement for any Facebook post uses the following formula:

$$\text{Engagement Level} = (\text{Number of Page Likes} + \text{Number of Shares} + \text{Number of Comments}) \times \text{Facebook Follower Factor}$$

Station	Number of Facebook Followers (1000s)
Follower Factor	
<u>Minneapolis</u>	
KSTP	83
$278/83 = 3.35$	
WCCO	129
$278/129 = 2.16$	
KMSP	329
$278/329 = 0.84$	
KARE	239
$278/239 = 1.16$	

Denver

KMGH 330

$$278/330 = 0.84$$

KCNC 87

$$278/87 = 3.19$$

KDVR 217

$$278/217 = 1.28$$

KUSA 444

$$278/444 = 0.63$$

Phoenix

KNXV 438

$$278/438 = 0.63$$

KPHO 237

$$278/237 = 1.17$$

KSAZ 549

$$278/549 = 0.51$$

KPNX 316

$$278/316 = 1.14$$

Tampa-St. Petersburg

WFTS 219

$$278/219 = 1.27$$

WTSP 165

$$278/165 = 1.68$$

WTVT 446

$$278/446 = 0.62$$

WFLA 214

$$278/214 = 1.30$$

$$4442/16 = 278k = \text{average number of followers for all 16 stations}$$

A raw engagement score of 1,000 for KSAZ would be adjusted via the Facebook Follower Factor to 510 (1000×0.51) while a raw engagement score of 1,000 for KCNC would be adjusted to 3,190 (1000×3.19). I will provide specific station follower factor results in the findings section later in this paper.

I used Facebook Messenger to contact more than 400 Facebook users who commented on television stations Facebook posts and eight agreed to participate in an initial survey-style questionnaire. The following questions were asked in that initial questionnaire:

1. How long have you had a Facebook account?
2. Why do you use Facebook?
3. What local news organizations do you follow on Facebook?
4. What is your favorite local television station?

5. What time of the day are you usually on Facebook?
6. How often do you watch the late news?
7. What type of television station Facebook posts catch your eye?
8. What prompts you to you to 'like', 'share', or 'comment'?
9. Do Facebook posts, particularly during primetime, prompt you to watch a late newscast?
10. What specifically about a Facebook post would prompt you to watch a newscast?

To gain a deeper understanding of consumer Facebook use, I asked the participants to take part in a more in depth phone interview. Three of the initial pool of respondents agreed to be interviewed on the phone. The phone interviews posed some of the same questions as asked in the questionnaire and also sought a deeper understanding of the relationship between Facebook use and television news viewing.

Findings

The majority of the respondents to the survey had been on Facebook for several years. The person who had used Facebook the longest had been a member since 2006. This is important because this group of individuals had a good understanding of Facebook and how it works. I didn't have to explain what a like, share or comment was. These people were savvy about how this particular social media worked.

In addition to having years to understand Facebook, being on the social network for a long period of time also helped them gain friends and follow pages of interest. The more friends you have and the more pages you follow, the more active your Facebook timeline becomes. This is important as it insured they were exposed to a variety of material while on Facebook. This was especially important when discussing the material that grabs their attention amid all of the noise.

Almost all of the respondents said they used Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family. The idea that social media allows people to instantly connect with people throughout the country, and for that matter, the world was very prevalent here. The respondents wanted to know what was going on with their friends and family and they also wanted to share what was going on with them. These ‘updates’ could be as simple as a textual comment or as complex as a video. The ability to connect and share was a common reason these people were on Facebook.

One of the participants said she used Facebook to decompress from her busy life. She says she normally unwinds with social media after putting her child to bed for the night. This same person says she uses Facebook for her job. She said that whenever her company has a job opening, it is her responsibility to post that job description on Facebook.

Another reason the respondents in my study said they use Facebook is to be updated on information. Some said they wanted to be informed about the news.

Others wanted to know about the latest sales at local stores. So, in this case, it was more ‘what was going on?’ instead of ‘who was doing what?’.

Most of those interviewed for this research said that Facebook was a part of their lifestyle. Using Facebook became part of their regular daily routine. It has become as much a part of the morning routine as drinking a cup of coffee or turning on the local news.

Although the respondents varied in their answers, all of them said they had a favorite local television station. The most frequently mentioned stations were KARE in Minneapolis-St. Paul and KUSA in Denver. Both stations are NBC affiliates and both are owned by Gannett. Considering this was such a small sample size, no real conclusions can be drawn from the respondents’ specific station preferences. But the fact that all of them had a favorite station shows there is a certain level of loyalty involved.

Some of the study subjects followed news organizations on Facebook because they wanted to be informed about their community. They said they can’t watch the news all the time and that social media was a good way to stay on top of current events. One participant said he felt that information on social media that originates from a television news organization was more credible than other information.

The respondents varied in their answers to my question of what catches their eye within their Facebook timeline. Some said that crime in the community

and horrific events would cause them to interact with a particular Facebook post. One respondent cited posts that cause discussion or debate as eye-catching.

But many of the people I interviewed said positive posts stuck out to them. They felt as though negative posts were so prevalent that they ignore or reject these types of posts. Part of it was that they were being numbed by all the negative posts. In their mind, there were so many that they all looked the same. A positive post was different and therefore would distinguish itself from the rest.

Positive posts also stuck out to many of the respondents because it was what they wanted. They told me they preferred positive posts and wanted to see more of them. This is another possible reason that, for the most part, the positive posts did a better job of grabbing their attention.

Let's discuss again Napoli's Framework for engagement. As you recall, it begins with awareness and ends with behavior. In this study's case, behavior represents somebody taking action after viewing a television station's Facebook post. In the realm of Facebook, actions include 'liking', 'sharing' and/or 'commenting' on a post. A behavioral change when social media users take action after reflecting on the content (Napoli, 2011).

So what type of Facebook post prompts a user to take action? When I asked this question of my research subjects, there was solidarity. The people engaged with posts that were positive in nature. As discussed earlier in this paper, positive posts could be classified as having a pleasant, satisfying, impressive, or

optimistic nature to them. The respondents were much more likely to “like”, “share” or “comment” on a post that was positive.

Most of the 303 posts I analyzed were neutral in nature. They were pretty straightforward news posts informing the audience of something that occurred or was going to happen. A few people may have strong positive or negative thoughts about a neutral post because of his or her involvement with the story, but for the vast majority of the users, a neutral post did not elicit emotion.

The idea that the respondents were more interested in positive posts was verified by the number of likes, shares and comments the positive posts received. Rarely did a post from any of the 16 stations garner more than 500 likes, 50 comments, or 50 shares. Consistently, positive posts outpaced neutral or negative posts.

On March 5th, KMGH in Denver posted an update on the story of a missing girl. It reported the girl had been found safe. That particular post received 943 likes, 93 comments and 6,524 shares. The post was accompanied by a picture of the girl. One of the reasons this story was shared so many times is because there was a direct call for action in the posts text asking the public to share.



7News and TheDenverChannel.com

March 5 at 9:55pm · Edited ·

UPDATE: She has been found safe!

PLEASE SHARE to help find Sierra Trujillo!

The Denver 11-year-old was reported missing today -- she was last seen in the area of East Virginia Ave & Monaco Parkway. DETAILS on her description: <http://bit.ly/1EkFZdm>



Like · Comment · Share · 943 93 6,524

On March 3rd, WTVT in Tampa reported about a suspect who had thrown a brick at a car and the brick bounced back and hit him. This was caught on video. This post received 2,078 likes, 128 comments, and 695 shares. This post was considered positive because something bad happened to somebody who could be considered doing something bad.



On March 6th, KARE in Minneapolis posted a picture of one of their anchors wearing new glasses. This post was classified as positive because the image was of the anchor smiling and it was a more lighthearted subject matter. 2,104 people liked the post while 158 people posted a comment.



Finally, a post on March 4th by KNXV in Phoenix got a lot of attention. It was an image of the night sky over the Grand Canyon. 8,788 people liked this post, 177 posted a comment, while 1,547 people shared it with others. This post was deemed positive.



One of the respondents' answers may summarize why people share Facebook posts. She said that sharing a post with someone else could cheer them up. She also said that by sharing it was a way to express her thoughts. She said that sharing was also a way to inform others of something she deemed important.

Another respondent said that she only shares posts that are positive. She says that she never shares anything negative. This person also said she likes, comments or shares posts that show people doing good things for others. She said

that by engaging in the conversation she was showing her support for that person and that person's actions.

One interview subject said that she will take action when something appeals to her or if she has a personal feeling about the subject matter.

It is very apparent that some television station Facebook posts elicit more reaction and engagement on the part of the users. The message that I received from the people interviewed in my study was that positive posts led to more engagement.

The first table below counts the number of Facebook posts that are characterized by specific concepts. The second table tracks the number of posts by station and the engagement data.

Table 1

<i>CONTENT CATEGORY</i>		<i>VISUALS CATEGORY</i>		<i>VALENCE CATEGORY</i>	
ACTION CONCEPT		VIDEO CONCEPT		NEUTRAL CONCEPT	
Direct promise	58	Video link	6	Informational	42
Question	72	Direct video	7	Straight news	138
Quotations	12				
ATTENTION CONCEPT		PROFILES CONCEPT		POSITIVE CONCEPT	
Update	3	Portrait	37	Inspirational	14
Developing	2	Mug shot	14	Good News	18
				Funny	21
TYPE CONCEPT		NATURE CONCEPT		NEGATIVE CONCEPT	
News	194	Animals	15	Tragic news	17
Weather	22	Beauty shots	12	Bad news	35
Sports	16				

Table 2

Station	Posts	Engagement Level ₁	Avg. Engagement level per post	Follow Factor ₂	Weighted avg. engagement level per post
KSTP	18	2,044	113	3.35	378.55
WCCO	19	7,560	397	2.16	857.52
KMSP	13	5,361	412	.84	346.08
KARE	17	15,713	924	1.16	1,071.84
KMGH	22	33,817	1,537	.84	1,291.08
KCNC	28	4,909	175	3.19	558.25
KDVR	12	8,628	719	1.28	920.32
KUSA	33	22,908	694	.63	437.22
KNXV	11	19,685	1,789	.63	1,127.07
KPHO	6	1,441	240	1.17	280.00
KSAZ	18	22,714	1,261	.51	643.11
KPNX	11	10,027	911	1.14	1,038.54
WFTS	17	116,667	6,862	1.27	8,714.74
WTSP	37	13,164	355	1.68	596.40
WTVT	13	20,355	1,565	.62	970.30
WFLA	28	42,264	1,522	1.30	1,978.60
Overall	303	347,617	1,147	1.00	1,147

1 Engagement level is a total likes, shares and comments

2 Follow factor controls for differences in the number of followers of a television station's Facebook page

You'll note in the first table that the majority of posts fall into the News type concept in the content category and the Straight News neutral concept in the valence category. Most of what was posted during the research period by the stations were basic news stories that were relatively neutral. This suggests that stations were simply posting every day, standard stories most of the time.

Another interesting finding is that there were more posts characterized as negative as there were positive posts. This study does not get into why there were more negative posts, but it reveals a conflict with the respondents. It was clear that the respondents in this research want more positive news. Meanwhile, the majority of posts that were not considered neutral have been coded as negative.

The second table paints a picture of how many times each station posted on Facebook and the engagement data the stations bore from those posts. While WTSP posted most often (37 times) it did not have the highest average engagement level. Meanwhile, the station that had the highest engagement level, WFTS, only posted 17 times. You'll see that it was one particular post that substantially boosted those number when we discuss it later.

In Table 3, you'll see a breakdown of user comments in response to the station's posts. There were more than 32,000 comments among the 303 posts. Due to the sheer size and because in general responses tended to follow the same theme, I generalized the comments for each post. For simplicity sake, the codes

attached to the responses are labeled in accordance with the frequency in which they occurred. These are broken down into frequently, occasionally and rarely.

Table 3

<u>POSITIVE CATEGORY</u>		<u>NEGATIVE CATEGORY</u>	
TOUCHED CONCEPT		HOSTILE CONCEPT	
Thankful	Frequently	Annoyed	Frequently
Sympathetic	Frequently	Disgusted	Frequently
Understanding	Rarely	Upset	Sometimes
		Aggressive	Rarely
IMPRESSED CONCEPT			
		DISPLEASED CONCEPT	
Amazed	Occasionally		
Ecstatic	Rarely	Uneasy	Occasionally
Thrilled	Rarely	Frustrated	Frequently
		Worried	Rarely
OPTIMISTIC CONCEPT			
		DISCOURAGED CONCEPT	
Cheerful	Occasionally		
Passionate	Rarely	Sad	Frequently
Funny	Rarely	Disappointed	Frequently

The most frequently-occurring positive category code for the Facebook user comments is thankful. Meanwhile, the most frequently-occurring negative codes include: annoyed, disgusted, frustrated, sad and disappointed.

The positive category codes that occurred rarely include: understanding, ecstatic, thrilled, passionate and funny. The negative category codes that occurred rarely include: aggressive and worried.

Overall, negative category codes occur more frequently in relation to user comments. This makes sense considering we see in Table 1, that negative posts generated by the stations outnumbered the positive posts. A user is more apt to post a negative comment on a negative post. Again, there is a conflict between the idea that the respondents in this study want to see more positive posts. When presented with a negative post, users typically follow with a negative comment.

Clearly we see that people engage with television news Facebook posts. But does this activity online, within the confines of a social network translate to greater television newscast viewership? Not necessarily, based on what these television news stations are currently doing.

All of the respondents said that Facebook posts had no impact on whether they would watch a local television newscast. A Facebook post would not decide whether they would watch a future newscast. So, according to the respondents, the Facebook messages posted in early March 2015 by the 16 stations in this study, did not prompt them to watch news on television.

I then asked them what a post would need to include to entice them to watch a newscast that they would otherwise not watch. This could be a newscast of their favorite station during a time they normally would not tune in. Or it could be a different stations' newscast.

The answers once again referred to positive posts. One respondent said the station would need to show more good things than bad. This person did not want to turn on the television to see bad things. Instead, it was a positive post that would drive this person to watch a newscast.

Another person said that if she knew someone who was going to be in a story on the news that she would likely tune in. She also said that she is very loyal to her favorite station and that it would take an extraordinary Facebook post to prompt her to change her viewing habits and watch another station.

How do the subject responses link back to the U&G theory? We see a definite psychological element here. These respondents had enough self-awareness to know they preferred positive posts over negative ones. These types of posts might have made them feel good.

U&G suggests that people may seek out a specific medium for varying reasons. This was true in this research. A specific use for one respondent was to unwind from a busy schedule. While respondents share some reasons for using Facebook, each also had different motivations that were unique to her.

The respondents agreed that in general, a Facebook post does not influence their television viewing habits. If one is seeking news on the television

there are several choices. Based on the respondents' answers, they have a favorite news station and rarely stray from it. U&G would suggest that they are aware of that choice and they make that decision based on the news station that best fulfills their needs. One respondent commented that there could be instances where she would choose to watch another station over her favorite. She said that it would have to be an exceptional case for this to occur. In this instance, U&G also factors in. If a user changes the channel, she does so to fulfill a need to learn about something on another station.

This study examined the Facebook posts of 16 different television news stations during a one-week period.

The findings showed how some Facebook posts would gain a higher engagement score than others. I discussed the story out of the Tampa-St. Petersburg market about the abused dog. One of the initial posts about this story was created by WFTS on March 4, 2015. Why was this specific post so engaging?

Based on Napoli's framework for engagement, this particular story reached audience members at the appreciation/emotional level and in many cases, recall/attitude and then behavior.

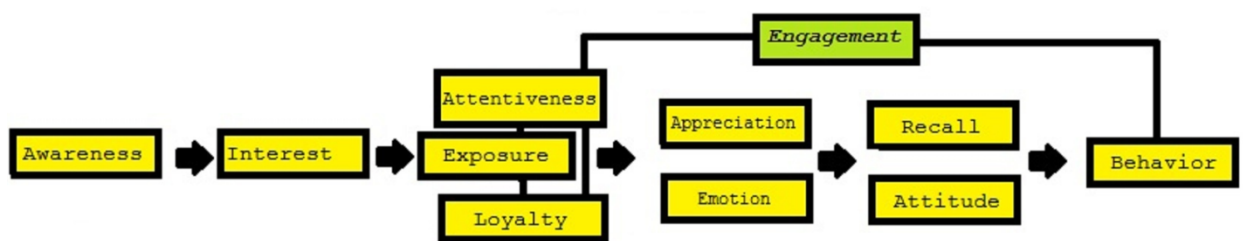


Figure A. Napoli's Framework for engagement (2011, 91).

The image of the injured dog carried by a police officer is an emotionally powerful picture.



This WFTS post on March 4 elicits myriad emotions. There is sympathy for the injured dog, appreciation for the caring officer, and outrage for those responsible for hurting the animal. Napoli talks about how at the emotional level, the medium may affect the user positively or negatively. I think this particular post received more than 7,000 comments because it affected people. It provoked emotions within that manifested in the engagement of the post.

Another reason this WFTS' post was so engaging was because the caption also had a call to action. It requested that users share the post with others in an effort to find the dog's owner. The post was shared more than 90,000 times. Each person that shared the post made it available to be seen by all of that person's

Facebook friends. Of course this can have an exponential effect where the post shared by one person can be seen by all of that person's Facebook friends. If one of those people likes, shares, or comments on the post – all of her friends are exposed to the message.

Using the follower factor for WFTS (1.27) we see that this post gets an engagement score of 138,396 (108,973 total likes, shares and comments multiplied by the station's follower factor of 1.27). You'll see in Table 2 that the average post for all stations gets a 1,147 engagement. This specific WFTS post received an engagement score that is 121 times greater than the average.

As we saw, a compelling, engaging post does not have to have a real story behind it. One of KNXV's posts on March 7, 2015 is a prime example.

Timeline Photos

[Back to Album](#) · [ABC15 Arizona's Photos](#) · [ABC15 Arizona's Page](#)

[Previous](#) · [Next](#)



ABC15 Arizona
Unbelievably beautiful.

Thanks to ABC15 photographer Eric English who caught this one-of-a-kind view at the Grand Canyon this week.

Album: [Timeline Photos](#)

Shared with: Public

[Open Photo Viewer](#)

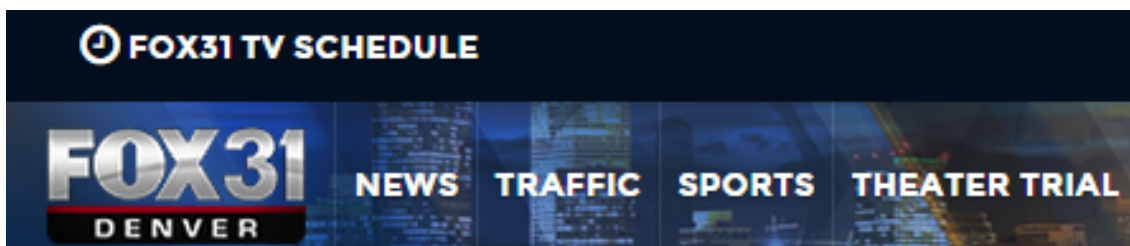
It was simply a picture of the sky above the Grand Canyon. Aside from a brief description of the photograph, the post's value was based purely on the image. The image captured the stars in the night sky and the snow-covered canyon. Of course, the interest in this picture had to do with its raw beauty. But there is also an element of proximity. Most of KNXV's Facebook fans live in Arizona. The Grand Canyon is considered one of the nation's natural treasures. Considering the Grand Canyon is located in Arizona it would make sense that it would have such strong local appeal with KNXV Facebook users. This post was also engaging via Napoli's framework for engagement. Similar to the story of the injured dog, it touched fans at an emotional level and led to an attitude being established and later an exhibited behavior.

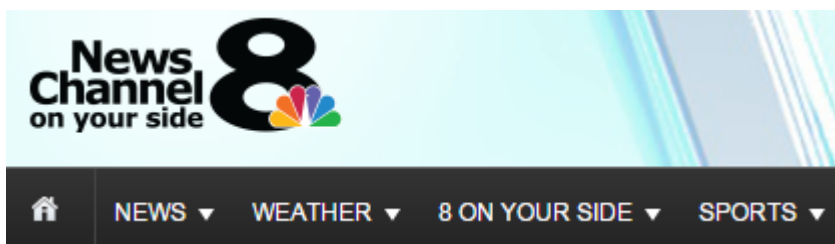
KNXV's post has an engagement score of 6,623 (10,512 total likes, shares, comments multiplied by the stations follower factor of 0.63). This score was significantly smaller than WFTS' post about the injured dog, but still nearly six times the average across all stations.

Earlier in this paper, I discussed the importance of Brand Extension Theory (BET) to my research. After dissecting the television station Facebook posts, it was evident how prevalent BET was.

Brand extension begins with how each station constructs its Facebook page. Each of these pages extends the television station's brand. First off, all of the Facebook feature a very prominent logo. This logo matches the logo on their websites and the logo graphic used within the station newscasts. Each of these

logos on all platforms is consistent. They use the same colors, shapes and text font. Television news stations often have multiple variations of their logo. The logos are basically the same. Some may include the station's website's URL. What follows are examples of the similarities between station web page graphics and Facebook page graphics reinforcing the presence of BET.







You'll note that while each website and Facebook page has subtle differences graphically, the overall idea or message is the same. All of the stations in my study had similar brand extension. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the similarities in graphics among a station's on air product, web page, and Facebook page are not random. The station has recognized that it's in its best interest to transfer the value of the station logo to other platforms. That association can strengthen a newer product (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004).

While examining the messages that stations posted on their Facebook page it was clear that brand extension was at play. The logos and slogans of the television news stations are prominently displayed on their Facebook page as a whole, but also within each individual post. There was a real effort by the stations to link their Facebook page with their television news brand.

I asked the participants of my research if they thought that a station's Facebook page was an extension of the television news brand. For the most part, they thought that there was brand extension at play. One respondent thought that her favorite station's Facebook page was an extension of its on-air news broadcast. But she didn't think this was necessarily just a television news

phenomenon. She thought it could be true of any company that markets its products on social media.

Another respondent watched her favorite local news station based on its news personalities. There was one particular anchor she found smart, witty and funny. She viewed all local news coverage as equal and that it was the news personality that caused her to like a particular station. She said she liked him because he showed his personality while many other anchors don't. She thought that the station's and the anchor's brand extended onto Facebook. An interesting side note – this respondent said that she is more interested in posts by news personalities instead of just a generic post by the station.

None of the more than 300 Facebook posts I examined were made by news personalities who worked at the stations. The only posts I researched were the ones created originally under the television news station brand.

Discussion

After analyzing the data of this research, it was clear the importance of the Audience Feedback Loop concept. From the perspective of a television station, Audience Feedback Loop is invaluable. Feedback from a station's Facebook audience can be immediate. A station can quickly see if a post is more engaging than others. This can influence future posts about this story or similar stories. It can also influence how a station presents the story on its website or on its television broadcast. The audience feedback can be a tremendously valuable

resource for organizations and can influence future decisions (Ramsaran-Gowdar & Fowdar, 2013).

A station may not have control over the news of the day as some days simply present more opportunities to tell stories that are more compelling. But, news organizations can control what content is presented on Facebook. This study shows posts that evoke more emotion do a better job at engaging the user. Based on the feedback loop, a station may choose to add more engagement-inducing emotion to a story post or choose to post an entirely different story that may have more of an emotional impact. The metrics are there; news organizations have the tools to identify what types of posts are getting the greatest engagement.

This study also examined the behavior of Facebook consumers and their interaction with the Facebook posts of television news stations.

The findings confirm that Facebook users join Facebook to connect with other people. The participants in this study used Facebook mostly to keep in touch with friends and family. Many were able to maintain long distance relationships through Facebook. They shared pictures with their social media friends and updates on what was occurring in their lives. They were also able to create a conversation in response to an original post made by others on that post.

The Uses & Gratifications Theory (U&G) seeks to find out what the audience does with the media (Chen, 2011). In this study, the use of Facebook gratifies a need by the users to stay in touch with others.

My research revealed that users also seek out television news organizations and follow them in order to be informed of the happenings in their community. The participants liked the convenience of having this type of information pop up on their timeline. By following the news organization, they prefer, the news is essentially brought to them; they do not have to actively seek it out (Ruggiero, 2000).

Some of the respondents confirm the work done by Katz & Gurevitch in 1973 that said media can serve as a diversion or escape of sorts. One particular respondent said that she enjoys looking at pictures on Facebook as she rode the train to work. She said it was a diversion from the boredom of a long, daily commute.

Another facet of the U&G theory that was confirmed by my research was the idea that media use will be different based on the individual needs and motives (Lee, 2013). One particular participant said she specifically sought out photos on Facebook. She was involved in photography and was drawn to interesting images that showed up on her Facebook timeline. This was different from another respondent who looked for updates on her family members whether it was text, a photo or video.

Napoli's Framework for Engagement was central to this research as was predicted. Napoli suggests that engagement begins with awareness and progresses through a variety of steps ending with behavior. A specific part of the behavior segment I was interested in for this research was the behavior of liking,

commenting on, and sharing a Facebook post. My research picked up at the final behavior step as I had only been interested in the Facebook users who had commented on a television news post. So, in a sense, my approach began with users who had already exhibited a behavioral change. I then attempted to work backwards and figure out why there was this behavioral change, i.e., making the effort to comment on a Facebook post.

The reasons why users would engage via a behavioral action varied among my research participants. They took action for myriad reasons. Some simply enjoyed a beautiful weather picture and posted a thank you to the television station for posting the picture and to the person who took the photo and shared it. Others commented on a post that featured new information concerning a controversial news story they were interested in. Still others took action by answering a question posted by the news station in the form of a Facebook post.

Limitations/Future Research

There were several limitations to the scope of my research. The first concerned the time frame of the study. I examined only a week's worth of Facebook posts. A better sample perhaps would have been a month's worth of messages. A longer timeframe would have allowed a better representation of the behavior of Facebook users. It would have also added a deeper understanding of the trends I noted in the findings section.

Considering there are more than 200 television news markets throughout the country, a sample of four markets is a small cross section. Again, to the earlier

point, a larger sample of markets and stations would have given more data to work with and a better gauge of Facebook user behavior. The study is also limited to the time period studied. I analyzed Facebook messages posted during the prime time evening period. A three-hour sample is small especially considering that the television stations operate 24 hours a day. All of these limitations restricted the amount of data to analyze. Of course researchers must put limits on the data they collect. But in this case, more data would have been beneficial.

Another issue was the limited number of respondents. There were simply very few people who responded to my research request. Initially, a monetary incentive was not offered. This was initiated later in the research project when it was determined that few Facebook users were willing to participate. I believe by offering a monetary incentive from the start of this project would have been beneficial. It would have also helped to better study how one reaches Facebook users who are not your “friend”. Many times a person’s account is set up in a way that a message from someone who is not a friend will be directed to a separate message in box. In many cases, Facebook users don’t know this in box exists and even if they do, they rarely check it. I believe by researching the best practices of reaching Facebook users who are not your friends would have helped increase the number of willing research participants.

Initial Facebook message contact, email follow-up and phone conversations allowed me to conduct interviews with people throughout the country. But this technique certainly had drawbacks. I believe that by conducting online video interviews I would have gained a better understanding of the

subjects' responses. Simply seeing someone's facial expressions would have been invaluable to this research. Facebook messages, email and phone conversations simply cannot offer this. Many people are familiar with video chat applications such as Skype, Facebook's Facetime, and Google Chat. In the instances where someone is not familiar with these applications, a simple tutorial would have allowed them to participate. If they are using Facebook to communicate, it's likely they would be able to figure out a video chat.

The advantage of having a video chat is the respondent's ability to see me. I believe seeing the person who is doing the interview would promote a more relaxed interview session. There would be more of a connection with that person. I believe it would also encourage deeper responses and a greater opportunity for follow up questions. Video chat could also allow for the use of visual aids. By offering a visual aid for the respondent to see would help that person better understand the question at hand. An example would be to display specific Facebook posts and message responses.

I believe my study lays the groundwork for future scholarly work that studies the interaction between television news station Facebook pages and the users who follow the pages. At the very least, I believe it gives researchers something to consider when exploring this emerging area of study. Using the ideas in this study does not have to be limited to just the study of Facebook. They can pertain to other social media as well.

This study can also be beneficial to those working in the television news industry. The findings can help shape their newsroom best practices when it comes to social media use. While much of the information gathered is specific to certain markets and certain stations, there are certainly general findings that can pertain to any station, anywhere in the country.

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